

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3145

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6360

FOL SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO DACCA, MADRAS, BOMBAY FROM  
CALCUTTA MAY 3, 1977 SIGNED KORN RPTD YOU

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 1042

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, IN  
SUBJ: WEST BENGAL GEARS FOR STATE ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: THE NEXT GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL IS LIKELY TO  
BE A JANATA/CFD COALITION, WITH CPM LEADER JYOTI BASU AS A  
SENIOR CABINET OFFICER. THIS SEEMS ALMOST CERTAIN IF JANATA  
AND CPM EXTEND THEIR LOK SABHA ELECTORAL ALLIANCE TO THE  
STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS NOW SET FOR MID-JUNE BUT IS POSSI-  
BLE EVEN IF THE TWO PARTIES GO TO THE POLLS SEPARATELY OR  
WITH ONLY A LIMITED UNDERSTANDING. FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS CAL-  
CUTTA PUBLIC THE PROSPECT EVOKES BITTER MEMORIES OF THE  
UNITED FRONT DAYS OF THE LATE 1960S. AND THIS MAY TURN OUT  
TO BE THE CONGRESS' BEST - POSSIBLY ITS ONLY - SELLING  
POINT IN ITS CAMPAIGN.

2. NOW THAT THEY ARE DEFINITELY SET - FOR MID-JUNE - THE  
STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS WILL FORCE DECISIONS ON THE TWO  
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ISSUES THAT HAVE DOMINATED POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL SINCE  
THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS: THE QUESTION OF WHETHER JANATA AND  
THE CPM WILL RENEW THEIR ELECTORAL ALLIANCE FOR THE ASSEMBLY  
CONTEST, AND THAT OF THE FUTURE OF THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS.

3. THE CPM SEEMS BADLY TO WANT TO EXTEND THE COMBINATION  
THAT WORKED SO WELL HEREIN THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS. IT HAS

AGGRESSIVELY COURTED JANATA AND CFD DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, WITH SUPRISING PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION - SO MUCH SO THAT A LOCAL COLUMNIST COMMENTED A FEW DAYS AGO THAT THE CPM WAS DOING WITH JANATA/CFD JUST WHAT THE CPI HAD DONE WITH CONGRESS, AND WAS MAKING JUST AS BIG A MISTAKE. THE CPM'S ARDOURS HAVE NOT BEEN UNIFORMLY SHARED ON THE JANATA/CFD SIDE. SOME THERE WOULD PREFER NOT TO HAVE ANY AGREEMENT WITH THE CPM THOUGH MOST REALIZE THAT JANATA MIGHT HAVE A HARD TIME WINNING THE MAJORITY IT WANTS IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY WITHOUT CPM SUPPORT. AT THIS POINT MOST KNOWLEDGE-ABLE PEOPLE HERE THINK JANATA AND CPM WILL GET TOGETHER ON AN ADJUSTMENT OF SEATS. AS CALCUTTA POLICE COMMISSIONER BASU REMARKED TO ME OVER THE WEEKEND, THE CPM NEEDS JANATA FOR RESPECTABILITY AND JANATA NEEDS THE CPM FOR ORGANIZATION, AND BOTH KNOW IT AND WILL MAKE THE NECESSARY ACCOMODATIONS.

4. THE CRUX OF THE MATTER OF COURSE IS HOW MANY SEATS THE CPM IS TO BE ALLOTTED. THE STATE ASSEMBLY COUNTS 294. THE CPM WOULD LIKE 150 FOR ITSELF AND ITS TWO LEFT ALLIES (FORWARD BLOC AND RSP) BUT IS EXPECTED TO SETTLE FOR ONE HUNDRED. THIS WAS A FIGURE THAT AT LEAST UNTIL A FEW DAYS AGO JANATA AND CFD LEADERS WOULD HAVE AGREED TO. WE ARE TOLD THAT NOW THAT JANATA AND CFD HAVE MERGED THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT GIVING CPM AND ITS LEFT ALLIES ONLY 70 OR 80 SEATS. THERE WILL BE SOME HARD BARGAINING BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES IN THE WEEKS AHEAD. IF JANATA AND CPM DO REACH AGREEMENT, A JANATA/CPM STATE GOVERNMENT IN WEST BENGAL SEEMS ALMOST ASSURED. WE ARE TOLD THAT JYOTI BASU HAS HIS HEART SET ON BEING A CABINET OFFICER HERE AGAIN, AS HE WAS IN THE UNITED FRONT

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GOVERNMENT IN THE LATE 1960S, AND IS READY TO SERVE AS JUNIOR PARTNER TO P.C. SEN OR WHOMEVER JANATA CHOOSES AS CHIEF MINISTER. IF THERE IS NO AGREEMENT, THEN THE STATE ELECTIONS WILL BE A THREE-CORNERED CONTEST - AND NO DOUBT A BITTER ONE - BETWEEN JANATA, CPM AND CONGRESS, WITH POSSIBLY NO ONE GETTING A MAJORITY AND JANATA AND CPM STILL ENDING UP IN SOME SORT OF COALITION.

5. THOUGH THE CPM HAS BEHAVED ITSELF QUITE WELL SINCE THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS AND SOME BUSINESSMEN ARE READY TO LIVE WITH A JANATA/CPM CABINET, THE PROSPECT EVOKES BITTER MEMORIES OF THE UNITED FRONT DAYS OF THE LATE 1960S. "SHADEE OF THE UF" MAY TURN OUT TO BE THE CONGRESS' BEST SLOGAN IN THE WEST BENGAL CONTEST, POSSIBLY ITS ONLY GOOD ONE. BUT WHO AND WHAT THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS WILL BE WHEN IT GOES TO THE POLLS IN JUNE IS ANOTHER AS YET UNDECIDED QUESTION. CONGRESS HERE IS CURRENTLY IN A VERY SAD STATE, RENT BY THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FORMER PRO AND ANTI-SANJAY FORCES WHICH CONTINUES NOW UNDER DIFFERENT GUISE AND BY THE COMPETITION

FOR LEADERSHIP OF THE CONGRESS PARTY ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL. FORMER HOME MINISTER TARUN KANTI GHOSH, WHO FELL OUT WITH CHIEF MINISTER RAY ALMOST A YEAR AGO AND WAS FIRED BY RAY AFTER THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS, HAS BEEN NEGOTIATING ENTRY INTO THE CFD OR JANATA FOR SOME TIME. MANY OF THE OTHER WEST BENGAL CONGRESS LEADERS WHO BACKED SANJAY GANDHI'S UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO UNSEAT RAY LAST FALL WOULD REPORTEDLY ALSO LIKE TO FIND NITKHES IN JANATA. IT IS RUMORED THAT EVEN RAY AND HIS FOLLOWERS MIGHT LEAVE CONGRESS IF MRS. GANDHI WINS CONTROL OF THE PARTY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. MORE LIKELY THEY WILL STAY IN. BUT WITH DEFECTIONS TO JANATA AND OTHER BREAKAWAYS, CONGRESS IN WEST BENGAL COULD LOSE MOST OF ITS ILXORSERVATIVE/MODERATE WINGS. IF SO IT WOULD GO TO THE POLLS ON A LEFT-LEANING TICKET LED BY SIDDARTHA RAY, ARUN MOITRA AND FORMER YOUTH CONGRESS PRESIDENT P.R. DAS MUNSHI. RIGHT NOW CONGRESS POLL PROSPECTS LOOK DIM, THOUGH THEY MIGHT IMPROVE SUBSTANTIALLY IF JANATA AND CPM FALL OUT.

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## Message Attributes

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